

wine time



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Pick up spirits or blow refund with tax-day wines

Most people fall into two categories this time of year. Either you are getting a big refund on your income taxes or you took a hit and are feeling pretty broke. Both types of people need a special wine to help them deal with the IRS.

I have some recommendations to help as you approach the April 15 deadline. And, no, you cannot deduct the cost of your wine on your taxes, even if you drink while filling out the forms. (I recommend saving the wine until after you have filled out the forms.)

Let's start with the inexpensive wines because people who had to write a check to Uncle Sam really need something to pick up their spirits. All of these except Troublemaker are \$15 or less.

- **Troublemaker** from Hope Family Wines in Paso Robles runs about \$20, but that won't put a big dent in your wallet, and this blockbuster blend drinks like a more expensive wine.

It is a complex, powerful wine filled with fresh, bright fruit flavors, dark ruby in the glass, with inviting aromas of black cherry and vanilla. Raspberry and strawberry flavors dance in the mouth with a slight black pepper finish. Open the bottle at least 20-30 minutes before drinking.

The wine starts with a typical Rhone-style Grenache-Syrah-Mourvedre blend and adds some

Zinfandel and Petite Sirah. It also takes wine from two vintages. The current release is lot six, with the blend changing with each version. The wine is wonderful, and I love the name. It's perfect for tax time.

- **Aia Vecchia Vermentino Maremma Toscana** is a refreshing white from Tuscany that costs only \$12. The Vermentino grape is the backbone of the wine, offering aromas of grapefruit and grass followed by tropical flavors of mango and guava.

This medium-bodied wine is aged in steel for four months, giving it a crisp freshness. This will be great for sipping in spring and summer, long after you have forgotten your tax battles.

Even at this price the Pellegrini family produces high-quality wine from hillside vineyards. It will be fine as an aperitif or with salads or seafood.

- **Trivento Amado Sur Torrontés** from Argentina highlights the overlooked Torrontés grape. Grown almost exclusively in Argentina, the Torrontés grape produces a distinctive, refreshing wine.

The Amado Sur is 80 percent Torrontés, 10 percent Viognier and 10 percent Chardonnay. The aroma is almost like a perfume, with floral notes of rose and jasmine combined with peach and citrus. On the palate it is fresh and fruity with a mineral acidity. It has a

long, silky finish.

The Viognier provides the citrus notes and some sweetness while the Chardonnay gives it elegance. It is fermented in stainless steel tanks for 15 days to preserve the sharp, fresh flavors. This is another summer sipper that will pair well with salads and light meals.

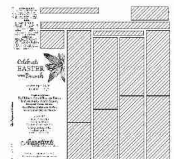
- My last bargain-bin beauty is a long-time favorite, **Pine Ridge Chenin Blanc-Viognier** from California. Pine Ridge first created this unusual blend in the early 1990s as an experiment and even though it became one of the winery's top sellers the price has remained low.

The wine opens with fresh pear aromas and flavors of grapefruit and apple. It is a crisp, clean wine that matches well with all kinds of food.

The blend is 80 percent Chenin Blanc, a grape that is popular in France and South Africa. In this blend it produces an elegant wine that will soothe your nerves after fighting the tax battles.

Now, if you have hit the jackpot and gotten a refund, why not spend some of that bounty on a splurge wine? I would recommend:

- **Frank Family Cabernet Sauvignon** (\$50) is the epitome of Napa Valley Cabs. It has rich aromas of black cherries followed by powerful tastes of plum, raspberry and coffee. There is a slight minerality to the finish.



The current release, 2010, is a powerful, complex wine, aged 20 months in oak barrels. It will continue to improve for several years, but if you want to celebrate now with a special meal, this is the perfect wine.

● **Austin Hope Syrah** (\$42) is another great wine for a special meal. Blackberry and plum aromas lead to layers of fruit flavors. Blackberry, blueberry and licorice combine with a lively acidity for a flavor explosion.

As the wine opens in your glass, the complex flavors keep changing, leading to an ever-wider smile on your face. Vineyard lots spend 10 months in oak barrels before they are blended and returned to the barrel for three months. The **Austin Hope Grenache** is similar, with elegant tastes of cherry and strawberry

and a long, smooth finish.

● **Chateau Montelena** (\$50) has been a special Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon for a long time. It has the elegance and restraint of an Old World wine with the exuberance of New World fruit. The nose opens with big, ripe, red fruits, followed by bright and lively flavors of red fruit and blueberry. The wine spends 14 months in oak barrels and another 11 months in the bottle before it is released.

Founded in 1882, Montelena is known for great wines. Their 1973 Chardonnay beat four white Burgundies in the famous 1976 tasting that shocked the wine world.

If you got a big refund or feel especially happy over finishing your tax return, pop the cork on a bottle of bubbly. Nothing says celebration like Champagne.

Three of my favorites are:

● **Taittinger Prestige Rosé** (\$65) is a gorgeous salmon-peach color with lots of dancing bubbles. It has aromas of crushed raspberries and cherries. Raspberry flavors are balanced by a crisp acidity to make a great food wine.

● **Charles Heidsieck Rosé Reserve** (\$80) has aromas of strawberry jam and cinnamon with lively flavors of raspberry, strawberry and blackberry. The color, the bubbles the lively aroma all combine to make a memorable evening.

● I used to love **Moët & Chandon White Star**, which now seems to be called **Imperial** (\$50). It is a bright and lively Champagne with notes of apple, pear and minerals. It is drier than the Rosés I recommended, so it would be a good way to start an evening.

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